

Water Quality Team Meeting Notes

February 14, 2006

1. Greetings and Introductions.

Today's meeting of the Water Quality Team was chaired by Mark Schneider and facilitated by Robin Harkless. The following is a summary (not a verbatim transcript) of the topics discussed and decisions made at this meeting. Anyone with questions or comments about these notes should contact Kathy Ceballos at 503-230-5420.

It was noted that Jim Adams' presentation about the Cascades Island monitoring station has now been posted to both the TMT and WQT websites. Adams added that Mike Schneider's report on the known physical characteristics of TDG below Bonneville is now in draft form and under review by Corps staff; it includes a discussion of key technical issues associated with TDG in this reach. Once the Corps' internal review is completed, the report will be distributed to the WQT for review, probably within a couple of weeks.

2. Removable Spillway Weir Briefing.

This topic was rescheduled for the March WQT meeting.

3. Corps Response to Comments on Draft Report, "Total Dissolved Gas Effects on Fishes of the Lower Columbia River."

Rudd Turner said that, following the January WQT meeting, the Corps received and agreed to the final PNNL report. The Corps' response to the comments received on this report was distributed about a week ago. PNNL also provided some response to comments, most of a fairly technical nature. In other words, said Turner, there were actually two responses to comments – one from the Corps, and one from PNNL. We agreed to answer any questions or concern about those responses to comments at today's meeting, said Turner -- hence this agenda item.

What are the next steps after this report? Agnes Lut asked. It's a piece of information that will be used in the future, but for now I guess you could say it has been shelved, Turner replied. One decision that has been made, as you're aware, is that we

will continue to monitor at Camas/Washougal in 2006. The report will ultimately be used to plan for future needs, he added.

Schneider noted that it isn't accurate to say that the federal agencies agreed to continue monitoring at Camas/Washougal; NOAA Fisheries, for one, would like to see that site discontinued as a point of management. Adams replied that the action agencies hope to resolve that issue, and others, prior to the next Oregon waiver request in 2008.

We have talked in the past about the timeline for submitting that waiver request, said Schneider. I believe we need to have our waiver request to the Oregon DEQ commission by early December, 2007, Adams replied. The request for a new Washington waiver (the current waiver expires prior to the 2008 spill season), will need to be submitted in about the same time-frame. It was agreed that the WQT will revisit this topic as the deadline for waiver request submission comes nearer.

Returning to the report, Schneider said that several members of the WQT did not agree with the final outcome of the Synopsis Report; and continue to disagree on the outcome and conclusions of the report. Schneider also took exception with some of the COE's response to comments. Specifically, Schneider disagreed with the response stating that the WQT had not called for the TDG report. He cited earlier WQT meeting notes from July 25, 2006, documenting the team's direction to the COE for a synopsis of recent literature. The report is now on the shelf, but is available for use, Turner noted; it has been posted to the WQT website, and what happens to it next is up to the region. Is it the Corps' expectation that someone else is going to do something with this? Regional support is key to developing a program, Turner replied; funding is another key. I guess what I would say is, don't look to the Corps to unilaterally force some sort of major TDG program down the region's throat, he said. We are willing to work jointly with others in the region to get this rolling, however, Turner said.

4. Corps Summary of the Corps of Engineers Plan of Action for Dissolved Gas Monitoring in 2006.

Jim Adams provided a brief overview of the 2006 Plan of Action, with an emphasis on how it is different from the 2005 plan. He noted that the 2006 plan has been posted to the TMT website under the "Water Quality Programs" tab. He reiterated that, in 2006, the Camas/Washougal gauge will continue to be used as a point of compliance in managing TDG below Bonneville.

The group offered a few clarifying questions and comments; ultimately, Adams said that, barring any further significant comments, this is the plan the Corps will implement in 2006.

5. WQT Discussion of Lower Columbia River Dissolved Gas Monitoring in 2006 Spill Season.

Adams said that, since the Corps will be modifying the Warrendale gauge, and will only be using it to monitor TDG during the chum operation, his question was, is there a better location to do so? I'm not sure we can answer this question fully right now, because the upcoming Battelle study will heavily influence the decision as to how TDG should be managed below Bonneville. The instruments for this study will be deployed March 26, at two sites at Ives Island and two at Multnomah Creek. The information from the sensors will be downloaded every two weeks.

The group devoted a few minutes of discussion to the question of whether or not Warrendale is an acceptable surrogate location at which to monitor TDG at the chum spawning sites. In response to a question, Adams said that, according to the Corps' data, if there is one foot of depth compensation over the redds, it is possible to spill to 108% TDG at the Warrendale gauge without exceeding 105% TDG at the redds; if there is two feet of depth compensation, it's possible to spill to 111% TDG at Warrendale. And this year's Battelle study will give you better information about what's actually going on at the redds? Harkless asked. That's correct, Adams replied. The group also discussed the role of the tidal influence on tailwater depth at the chum spawning sites.

It sounds, then as though it may be a secondary issue that Warrendale is being used as a management site for TDG, said Adams – it sounds as though the key issue is really the Bonneville tailwater elevation, and compensation depth over the redds. Margaret Filardo observed that, given the modest amount of spill that will occur this year, a tailwater depth of 14 feet should be sufficient.

Is the WQT happy with measuring TDG at Warrendale, as a surrogate for TDG at the chum spawning sites, or would you prefer that we monitor at some other location? Adams asked. I'll ask FPAC to weigh in on that next Tuesday, Filardo said. With respect to 2007 and beyond, that will depend on the outcome of the 2006 Battelle monitoring results, she said.

It sounds, then, as though people feel that the results of the Battelle study will determine the longer-term monitoring strategy, Harkless said. No disagreements were raised to that characterization.

Moving farther downstream, Turner said that, in terms of additional monitoring this year, there was an internal Corps meeting last week to discuss taking a look at some critical habitat areas in the lower river. We're likely talking about just a few sites, to be monitored for temperature and TDG over a relatively short time-period, Turner said. Using a tiered approach, we would start out with available information, and then move on to testing, before determining how much additional study may be warranted. We have the PNNL report in, a synthesis of the available data; logically, we would next measure current levels of TDG and temperature. Funding is very tight within the Corps at the moment, and will be again next year, Turner said; however, we would like to get

some critical habitat TDG monitoring going at least at a couple of sites in 2006.

There are some habitat restoration sites the Corps is working on, currently, Peters said; those areas may provide a possible venue for TDG monitoring in both the mainstem and in the slough areas. Will there be a study plan available, and will you be doing any biological monitoring in conjunction with this effort? Lut asked. Not this year, Adams replied. Margaret Filardo noted that, without some basic primary productivity data, the isolated TDG information the Corps is proposing to obtain would be fairly meaningless; she suggested that the Corps also attempt to obtain at least basic chlorophyll a data as well.

After a few minutes of further discussion, Adams said this project is still in its formative stages; the Corps is still investigating potential sources of funding. Jill Leary of the Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership (LCREP) noted that there is considerable shallow-water habitat monitoring going on in the reach below Bonneville; she encouraged the Corps to investigate these ongoing monitoring projects in order to avoid duplication of effort. We'll talk to the LCREP people about that, Turner replied, and get a copy of their work plan. It was noted that LCREP will be picking specific monitoring sites during March and April, and monitoring during May and June, so there is still a little time before the WQT needs to make a decision or recommendation.

6. Next WQT Meeting Date.

The next Water Quality Team meeting was set for Tuesday, March 14. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.